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Chair

Mr. Larry Miller

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• (1110)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC)): We'll call the meeting to order. The other meeting was a little bit late leaving, but for the sake of time, we'll get going.

At the last meeting, there was a motion to make this meeting public. We are meeting in public unless there is a wish to do otherwise. Not hearing anything on that, I'll leave this meeting open, and we'll get back to laying out the groundwork on where we want to go.

Who wants to lead off? I believe we were down to the part about program review.

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Chair, could you remind us where we were exactly?

The Chair: You're younger than I am, Mark.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Mark Eyking: Did we leave on a good note or...?

The Chair: I think we always do.

I'll ask the clerk to correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe we were at the point where we had discussed listeriosis and agreed on a subcommittee. I believe the whips of the parties are meeting or have met on that. I haven't heard the results. That probably will include suggested meeting dates and times and the layout of the committee. I think we passed a motion here last time that the subcommittee, while probably smaller in numbers, will have the same makeup as far as representation goes, or as close as possible.

Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): I just got an e-mail saying that apparently the whips have agreed to a seven-person subcommittee on listeriosis, so I guess that's going ahead. I imagine they'll be working out who is going to be on the committee. That's apparently in the works.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: The other thing, while we're at the stage of setting our schedule, is that I've taken the liberty of throwing some thoughts together on dates, following the schedule that our steering committee had. I believe the clerk has some copies to distribute at this meeting. It's my understanding that they would be here to distribute at the meeting. I have it in both languages.

I just thought it would make things go more quickly, because I actually put dates to some of these topics. Subsequent to that, Brian

and I talked. There is a suggestion that we look at some of the competitiveness stuff first. We can talk about that, but it's here. I thought copies would be distributed at the meeting.

The Chair: There are no copies of that, but I think, Alex, that hopefully some time today we're going to get a tentative idea of where to lay them out. It's going to depend on witness availability for some of them.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Should I give the clerk one copy? Maybe we can do something with that. It's in both languages.

The Chair: Okay, we can do that.

I have Mr. Shipley and then Mr. Bellavance.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

I'm just wondering, Mr. Atamanenko, how does that work with the subcommittee? I'm not sure what's on that copy, but I thought the steering committee actually would set the dates, set the agenda, and look at what was coming up. I thought that was the purpose of the steering committee.

The Chair: The idea of that steering committee was to come up with the proposed items to discuss and lay out an approximate amount of meetings that they expected it would take. That then comes back here, which is what we're discussing right now. Depending on what happens here today, we'll know how many meetings, the order, and that kind of thing. I guess there's nothing wrong with Mr. Atamanenko proposing that, but again it has to be—

Mr. Bev Shipley: No, it could be used, I guess. It's just a thought, that's all. I didn't have it in front of me, so I was just wondering how that process worked with dates being put forward and how that will fit into today's agenda.

The Chair: Once the committee decides on the priority of issues and approximately how many witnesses.... Of course, the witnesses are going to be determined by when each and every of you gets your witness lists in. If we get done today, I'm probably going to suggest that by late tomorrow we get them in, and then we can start to know. A lot of these witnesses like to know a week in advance, if possible.

Once we get the direction from the committee, it will be up to the clerk to sit down, try to fill in the list, and see who we can get. The committee may decide that they want a certain group here at the next meeting or two meetings down the road, but that may not work for witnesses, so what we'll do is get them in as soon as possible after that. That's all we can do.

Mr. Bellavance is next.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Thank you. Today the discussion is about our future topics of discussion. The clerk has just given us the first report on the tentative schedule. I suggest that we look at it together and discuss which priorities to highlight. We have to begin by deciding what we are going to talk about and how many meetings to dedicate to each topic.

Larry mentioned the availability of witnesses. Let me point out that, if we begin by reviewing programs, obviously we will want to ask a lot of public servants to appear—people who are readily available. That is a suggestion. We would not have too much trouble getting started on our work if we began with that question.

I would like to talk about another point. With the steering committee, I came back to product of Canada labelling, and I think I raised the issue with the main committee. A rule was amended and lots of people reacted to this rule of 98%. I felt it was of utmost importance for the committee to hold sessions on this issue, if only one or two. This file has to be discussed again, even if the committee did some excellent work in this connection. I do not want us to start over from the beginning on this file. However, the amendment of this rule to come up with 98% has consequences for both producers and processors. I have received information not only from Quebec but from everywhere concerning this decision.

So the committee should take a look at this question, which is not on the tentative schedule. I would have liked to see it there. As far as I am concerned, I intend to discuss it and let the committee know that I plan to come back to this subject.

• (1115)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Bellavance, correct me if I'm wrong, but I think if the product of Canada labelling had been discussed at the subcommittee, it would have been on here. You're asking for something over and above what the subcommittee talked about that day.

Mark.

Hon. Mark Eyking: We did talk about labelling, but program review was number one. I think we're going to settle that one in a minute.

I think we agreed on some sort of motion last meeting about product of Canada labelling. That might flow into what André is saying as part of where we're going. Add it to the agenda, I guess.

Wasn't there a motion about labelling? Does the clerk have one there? That could clarify where we should be going.

The Chair: There was a motion moved by Mr. Storseth, but that was on a different issue. There was one motion moved by Mr.

Hoback that the committee study the effect of current regulations on the competitiveness of farm products, etc. That was approved 11 to 0. Another one was moved by Mr. Lemieux at the standing committee, to study international trade and market development. It passed 11 to 0; it was unanimous. Then we were discussing that the committee proceed to reconsider matters related to committee business. That's where we are now.

Mr. Bellavance.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: We never discarded the question. But it does not appear on the tentative schedule. We talked about COOL, or mandatory country of origin labelling, but you said yourself that these were not things we could put together. COOL is really separate.

I reiterate my wish that the committee hold enough meetings between now and June to talk about the products of Canada file. I would very much like the committee to support this idea. I want us to discuss it today and for it to be added to the other items.

[English]

The Chair: That could be done simply enough, as long as we get a majority vote to do that.

André, you're suggesting that it basically go at the bottom of the list, but that it at least be included for now. Is that what you're saying?

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: We will not turn this into a half-hour fight today. I will present a motion if necessary. I wish to repeat to the committee that this is a file we should discuss.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Lemieux.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): I would like to support the comments made by Mr. Bellavance. We can talk very quickly for two hours without ever reaching a decision, if we do not organize our schedule today.

It would be a good idea to study the subcommittee's first report, to set priorities and add some more. This is the subcommittee's report and some changes need to be made to it. For example, it is suggested that we hold two meetings on listeriosis, when we do not need them.

So we have to adopt the first report and add other priorities, after which we can revise the schedule presented by Mr. Atamanenko. If we try to do two things at once, we are going to get to the end of the two hours without having decided anything and we will have to start the discussion over again at the next meeting.

• (1120)

[English]

I think we should focus on this first report, Mr. Chair. Let's start modifying it the way we, as a committee, want it. Then we can look at schedules and meetings.

Thank you.

The Chair: Fair enough.

I have Mr. Hoback, and then Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Chair, I have two points to make.

André brought up other business that he'd like to see added on here. I have other business I'd like to see on here too. I'd like to see the committee travel to western Canada to meet with representatives of the Canadian Wheat Board and other professionals to investigate the substantial losses in commodity trades over the past two years. I'd like to see that added to the list, for sure.

The second thing I'd like to point out here is that when we left this meeting, we talked about the priority of our meetings, and I believe Mr. Storseth was trying to move forward some priorities. One was that we move forward the cattle industry, which has some major things going on right now, as a priority, instead of where it's at. And maybe COOL could fall under those two cattle meetings. Perhaps we could move that forward on the agenda at a higher priority and then work our way back through it and try to coordinate Mr. Atamanenko's priority in there too.

The Chair: Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: I don't think there's anything stopping us from adopting the agenda that we set in the steering committee. Basically, that's what we've decided.

Once we get a copy of my breakdown—all it does is break things down by date—we can look at it and see where we can move things up or down, and add the labelling. That would be a good start. These dates have been worked out with holidays and things. So I suggest that we could probably just adopt the report and then move on. By that time, we should have a copy of this, and we can move on and see how this fits in. We could do it quickly.

The Chair: We have the first report in front of us. Let's get on to it.

There's one thing I should bring up. You may all be aware of it or you may not. Since we had our subcommittee meeting, some things in the U.S. regarding country of origin labelling have changed. They initially told us they were going to combine rules B and C, which would deal with the biggest part of the segregation part of it. Now that's not the case, after the comments from Secretary Vilsack last Friday.

The reason I'm bringing that up is that you may want to put a higher priority on the country of origin labelling. I just throw that out there. The rules now are different. We thought a lot of this had been dealt with, but it's actually right back where it started.

Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): On that point, I do think the cattle industry, both cattle and pork really, needs to be moved up considerably. That industry is in real crisis. The changes that we thought would be in the country of origin labelling to accommodate us are not there to the same extent we thought they would. The cattle industry's in trouble everywhere across the country. What people are saying, especially in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, is that the breeding cow herd is being sold off at historically high levels. This means that three years from now we're not going to have the breeding stock we require in the industry. So that's a really serious issue, and I do think we need to deal with it as soon as we can.

I have one other point, but not on that. When I went through the transcripts of the minister and department's appearance before the committee, there still remains, I think, a lot of confusion—or there certainly is in my mind—on where the programs are really at. He said in his testimony that the cost of production program has gone. Well, where has that money gone?

We need some answers on where the departmental spending is at. We've said that we do not believe there's been enough stimulus in agriculture in this budget, but we still don't even know, given the current programming of the department, the cost of production. Where has that money gone? Where is it being applied? We know AgriInvest isn't \$500 million, but \$190 million. Where did the rest of that money that was supposed to be targeted go?

So we do need some further answers from the department, whether it's in a briefing or a hearing, or whatever, but there are some questions that we need answered yet.

● (1125)

The Chair: Well, Mr. Easter, you're right. It suggests.... And depending again on what happens with the report in front of us, we have part of this recommendation from the subcommittee that deals with program review and the cattle industry in general, so I think I can say that would be the time to do it. If you want to call somebody from the department, or wherever, the committee has that option.

Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: I'm just wondering how long it's going to take to get those photocopies of my document, so we can take a look at it.

The Chair: I guess we have it here.

But we're discussing the report, Alex.

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I just want to support Alex on this. I've seen what he has done. It would actually expedite this, I think. He's taken the time to lay out the actual dates.

The Chair: Okay, I need this feedback from the committee. If you want it circulated, I'll have the clerk circulate it right now.

Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: What I'd like to do is propose an amendment to the first report.

The amendment would be that we remove the two proposed meetings on listeriosis. Just strike that line from the first report. We don't need to have two meetings on listeriosis when we've already struck a subcommittee on food safety. We now know that the subcommittee will be staffed by seven MPs, and there'll be duplication of effort otherwise.

That's my amendment.

The Chair: Okay. It's pretty straightforward.

You've heard the motion. Is there discussion on it?

Mr. Bellavance.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: I understand what Pierre means, but do we really have to amend all that? Could we not just discuss our priorities today and leave the subject of listeriosis to the subcommittee? Do we really have to present an amendment every time we want to make a change? I simply want to make our job easier. It seems to me that we could discuss this and decide to deal with such and such a subject.

[English]

The Chair: Well—

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: It is still a tentative schedule. Do we really need to amend each point?

[English]

The Chair: I guess it can be removed or not be removed in one of two ways, either by general consensus around the table and then being noted in the minutes, or by a motion. But I have a motion in front of me, and as chair, I have to deal with it unless it's withdrawn.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Chair, I can answer just a little bit about that.

There are two ways we can proceed. Number one is that we can work with the first report. We can accept it as a committee or we can modify it and accept it as a committee. That's one way to do it. The very straightforward way to do it is to delete the items we don't want, add items we do want, and vote on it. The other way is just to have general discussion, which we can have too.

With my engineering background, I'm just a little more categorical: if we don't want that in the first report and we eventually want to adopt the first report, let's strike it off then. If someone else wants to table a motion to add something to the report, then let's add it, let's debate it, and let's figure out where it fits in the list so we don't go round and round having general discussion but no decision at the end.

I'll leave it to your discretion, Chair, on how you would like to proceed.

I have the motion on the floor right now. If you would rather go with general discussion, I can withdraw that motion. If you want us to vote on amendments so that we're either adding or removing or changing the priority of items in the first report, I'm all right with that too. You just let me know.

The Chair: The chair doesn't have a preference one way or the other, except I'd like to get some production done if we can deal with that one.

Mr. Easter, do you have a comment?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Pierre, it would be perhaps better if you could withdraw the motion. Let's take the schedule Alex has set out here, juggle it around, and then move it as a motion at the end. We'd accomplish more that way, Mr. Chair, if I could say so.

My own view on what Alex has here is that I really do believe we need to move the cattle industry up. I'm sure the Canadian Cattlemen's Association could be here by Thursday. I know they have great concerns. I don't know whether we can invite witnesses

from the U.S. embassy or not, but we should have an explanation from the United States' side on what they're doing with COOL and tell them that, as a parliamentary committee, we're damned well not pleased.

I would suggest moving the cattle industry and COOL up together a little further and then preparing witnesses for program review.

The other point I would suggest—and I agree with what André said earlier on product of Canada labelling—is that I would like to see it up the list considerably. I am getting a lot of calls in my riding from people who produce a product of Canada but do not now meet the identity criteria because the Prime Minister went too far with the 98%. The Prime Minister overruled what this committee recommended, and now we have another problem. So we have to sort this out for those who are actually providing a product of Canada but can't call it such—they have boxes made and so on.

So I'd move it up.

● (1130)

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Easter.

To move the cattle industry and COOL up—that is on the report and that can happen with general discussion. To add in the product of Canada labelling, we'd probably have to have a motion from here, because that wasn't put on there at the subcommittee.

Is the motion withdrawn, Mr. Lemieux, or not?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I can withdraw it. I withdraw the motion. We can have this discussion.

(Motion withdrawn)

The Chair: In Mr. Easter's comments he is suggesting we move the cattle industry and COOL, combined, up in the list. Is there discussion on that?

Mr. Hoback, then Mr. Shipley.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Mr. Chair, I realize I was on the list 15 minutes ago, and I was just complaining that the chair is biased against me for some reason.

The Chair: Mr. Storseth, what happened is that you had spoken on what was a point of order and your name got stroked off on that. I apologize. I'll go to you right after Mr. Hoback.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I agree with Mr. Easter on the cattle industry and COOL being raised in priority, but I do have some concerns like Mr. Bellavance's. There are some issues that aren't on Mr. Atamanenko's schedule here that I think should be on. How do those get plugged into this schedule if they're not on here?

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Bellavance brought up the product of Canada labelling, and so has Mr. Easter. You brought up the investigation of the CWB. Those are three issues that are out there. We have to start somewhere. We need to decide here officially which way you want to go. We've had a suggestion to modify what Alex has put out here by moving some up, and I think that is what we should discuss. That doesn't preclude your concern on the Wheat Board, or any other one that is brought up, from being added.

Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I have a couple of things I'd like to do. One, I'd like to make sure that when we talk about competitiveness we're actually talking about my motion, which is very specific to the Competition Act, which is something that I know Mr. Easter has talked about since I was in school. This goes with the question I have for Mr. Easter. He wants to move the livestock industry discussion up in the schedule. I don't disagree with that, but my first question would be this. What are we going to accomplish that we didn't accomplish with the review of the red meat sector that we did less than a year ago today? I just want to make sure we're going to get some very real results out of this that he has envisioned.

Second, our farmers want to be able to farm the markets. I was at the finance committee last night when we were talking about the changes to the Competition Act that are coming through our budget. These are things that we need to be looking at. If we move this up the schedule so we could all look at it at the same time and put forward some very real recommendations there and try to get some movement on that, I think it is a necessary step before we start talking about program reviews. But I would like to hear Mr. Easter's ideas of what we're going to accomplish with the cattle side by moving it up, because I'm not against that. I just want to know what we're looking at accomplishing there that we haven't already done in recommendations.

And then I would like to try to add my motion in there. Maybe it comes after the cattle discussion, but I think it should be up near the top somewhere so that we can actually start talking about some of the changes that have to be made so that our farmers can have better access to markets and more open markets.

The last thing I would like to say is on this product of Canada issue. André has expressed concerns all the way through the last year when we talked about it. I know André was one of the guys with me who said that 80% or 85% is where we should be, but I do think we do need to set the record straight, and Mr. Easter and the Liberal Party came out in print on May 21 and tried to steal the Prime Minister's announcement, calling it a Conservative announcement made by the Liberal's agriculture product policy. He's using hindsight to try to revisit history here, but I think there are more productive things we can be doing than partisan games at this point in time.

Other than attacking him on that, I would like to hear his input on the cattle side.

• (1135)

The Chair: I will just make a comment on the competitiveness. It probably goes without saying that a portion of that is all about

looking into what's happening in the cattle industry. A direct review of the Competition Act still goes along with that whole thing.

Mr. Brian Storseth: I just want to ensure that this is part of what we're talking about when we talk about—

The Chair: I believe it is from the report that I've gotten from them.

Mr. Shipley is next.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Just to follow up, I need to also understand what we mean by competitiveness, because actually I think the numbers 5, 6, 7, and 8 may get drawn into that whole discussion, depending on what the intent by Mr. Easter is. I think we really need to be careful, Mr. Chairman. It's not just the livestock or the cattle that are affected by COOL. It's not just the cattle industry that is affected by the programs; it's not just the cattle industry that is affected by the competitiveness, so I think we need to be broader in terms of the red meat industry or when we talk about it.

Brian has touched on it. I would like to know where the competitiveness is, because I'm concerned about just having things happen for the sake of having things happen. We need to be concise about what we can accomplish under the competitiveness. If we can actually bring that forward and address those issues under it, then I think that's a direction in which we should be looking.

The Chair: There's no doubt the hog sector is going to be impacted.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Certainly in my riding.... I know there are areas where it's just beef, livestock. It's a red meat industry.

The Chair: Mr. Atamanenko,

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: I have a proposal to take us to March 24.

What I would suggest is this. The next meeting is in two days. That may be a good time to do a program review with our government folks, who can probably come in on a moment's notice. Then on March 3 we could do the Competition Act to look at that aspect that Brian wants to address as quickly as possible. On March 5 and 10 we could move right into COOL, and on March 12 we could have, as we had discussed here, that 45-minute PowerPoint by Darrin Qualman to zero in on the cattle industry. Then on the 26th—whatever the next day is—we could then have some cattle ranchers and/or representatives from the Cattlemen's Association. All of us have talked to ranchers who are hurting. It would be a good time to bring in folks right off the ground, in addition to the association. That would take us, I think, to the 24th or the 26th.

I just want to say that I think we really have a chance now to do something—all of us. I think this government has a chance to move something forward in the cattle industry. I think we can be part of this. I think that report that I've shared with many of you zeroes in on a number of items. There is something we could probably recommend to act right away. This could be a really good time to at least move forward a bit and try to help those guys who are hurting. The answer obviously isn't just more export, more export. We can do that, but there are things we could do that this report addresses. I think this is a time for all of us in history to make that shift and give the government in power credit for this. I think we have that chance. That's why I believe we should make sure we get that PowerPoint presentation.

Anyway, as I said, I think if we did the Competition Act, or program review, Competition Act, two sessions on COOL, two sessions on the cattle industry, see where that takes us, and then move in where we want to fit in product of Canada, more competition, more program review. That's my suggestion to kick this off.

● (1140)

The Chair: I just have some information that might help the committee here.

The Canadian Cattlemen's Association and the NFU were contacted, because these people have to make some travel plans. This is only tentative, but it was so that we could at least have a productive meeting on Thursday. The cattlemen have been put on notice that they could get invited as early as this Thursday, and they've agreed to that. It was pretty hard to get anybody else in next Tuesday. The NFU have tentatively been told they could be called by then. We did that just so that if today we got this finished, at least we could have a productive meeting on Thursday. So the clerk went ahead and did that.

That might help you in your discussion here today. I'm pretty sure from what we hear that those two groups could be here on those two days, if we want. If you want to change that, you have that option, but at least we're trying to get something ahead so we can have some meetings.

I have Mr. Hoback next, and then Mr. Bellavance.

Mr. Randy Hoback: In light of what you said, I'll just pass. Go ahead.

The Chair: Mr. Bellavance.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Contrary to appearances, we are making some progress. What Alex has just said applies to several aspects. Still, I would just like us to be careful. If we start something, we have to be able to finish it. We should not hold just one meeting on program review and then jump to another topic and then come back to it. It might get complicated.

There seems to be a consensus that the livestock industry file constitutes a priority. Personally, I do not have any objections, particularly since Randy and Larry were suggesting that we deal with COOL and the livestock industry file together. I would just like it if we did not delay the program review too long. That could be the

committee's second study, then we could carry on with competitiveness. We could reach a consensus on these files.

I would like to say to the committee that, according to Alex's schedule, we would still have, after April 30, at least 10 or 11 sessions till June 9, maybe even 15. The clerk can give us the exact figures. If the committee agrees to follow the same schedule for studying the major files already determined, the other sessions could be dedicated to studying other files we would like to add. Randy mentioned the Canadian Wheat Board. Alex hopes to hear a witness talk for 45 minutes about an NFU file. Wayne mentioned products of Canada.

I would also like to come back to the story of the people of Saint-Amable who were affected by the golden nematode in 2006. These people deserve to be heard for at least an hour in committee. Other members may wish to raise other subjects that we could add to the list and study between now and the beginning of June. That does not mean that we are stuck with this schedule come what may. All sorts of things can come up and force us to change certain aspects. It will be up to us to decide.

Today we could at least decide, for instance, to begin on Thursday studying the livestock industry and COOL files, to continue with the program review for so many sessions, then broach competitiveness. And then we could add other subjects up to June.

Does that seem reasonable to you?

[English]

The Chair: I think so. The nematode issue that you mentioned, André, is in the report further down. Is that correct?

A voice: No, it's not in there.

● (1145)

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: No, it has disappeared.

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry, it's in this other document. I knew I'd seen it someplace. I remember you bringing it up at the subcommittee, and I think you may have even brought it up here.

Mr. Atamanenko. You've already finished? Okay.

Mr. Shipley.

Mr. Bev Shipley: I'll go back again, Mr. Chairman, if I may, to what you mentioned on Thursday, that the Canadian Cattlemen's Association have been put on notice. I'd just remind again that I think it would be an opportunity to call the Canadian Pork Council to see if they would be available also as a red meat concern. It's a two-hour meeting. Maybe they could split an hour each for that, if they would be available. I don't know what others think about it.

The Chair: Well, they both probably have a lot of the same—

Mr. Bev Shipley: I think they would share some of the concerns, and we need to be inclusive of the industry. That's all.

The Chair: Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: That was the point I was going to make. I think we should invite the Canadian Pork Council as well. I don't know if there's anybody from the other red meat industries, such as sheep. I know it is a fairly big industry in Quebec, and it is impacted as well. If they could come as a third witness, that would be fine, but definitely add the CCA and CPC. They're all impacted.

The Chair: The clerk just noted or pointed out that there is two days' notice, but that doesn't mean we can't. Under the urgency, I'm sure they'd do their best.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I talked to them yesterday. They'd be more than glad to appear.

The Chair: Was that the comment you wanted to make? We had you on the list next.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Yes.

The Chair: Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think we need to move COOL up, and particularly how it affects the livestock sector, both beef and pork. I think we should do a short report on the committee's opinion regarding COOL and the changes to COOL and what it will mean in our livestock sector, because we're going to be speaking as the parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture. We do have a voice, and I think there's a lot to be gained by that.

What I'm noticing in our meeting, though, is that we don't really have a mechanism for deciding. When a member has an idea like this, how are we going to decide whether we move ahead with the idea or not? It goes back to our needing to have a way of changing this, otherwise we're going to go around in circles. I'm putting forward an idea here that COOL should move up, you've put forward an idea that we should have the Cattlemen's Association in, and we have an idea over here that the Pork Council should join us. We need a mechanism for agreeing and deciding, yes, we're doing it, or no, we're not, because someone else will have another idea in about two minutes and we're never going to quite resolve it.

I'm suggesting that we move COOL up. I'm suggesting that we prepare a report on that. That's going to take some time. I don't mean a lot of time, but the report has to be prepared and then reviewed. That takes committee time, so we'd want to make sure that we scheduled that in there.

But I would like to know what mechanism you would have for us to actually make decisions at some point. I'm not saying it has to be now, but how do we move ahead with certain ideas so we don't scatter into 10 ideas and not arrive at any decisions?

The Chair: The way I see it is that we have this report that came out of the subcommittee and we should deal with that. If you want to juggle around the order that the subcommittee came up with, that's your prerogative, and I'm hearing that suggested today. Any new items can simply be added to the one that Alex brought up. But right now we're dealing with the report that's in front of us. Everybody's got a copy of it.

When it comes to answering Mr. Lemieux's question about the mechanism, I think we should to try to get a general consensus today on the highest priorities. Sometimes the availability of witnesses will determine that. For example, one issue that we have at the top might

have to be moved one meeting because somebody couldn't come, but we'll make sure there are witnesses for one of the other categories that are near the top so we can go on. That's generally how it should work.

I hope that answers your question.

Mr. Easter and then—

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: I am first.

[English]

The Chair: If it's on this point, Mr. Bellavance.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Yes, I have something to say on this.

[English]

The Chair: Actually, I've got Mr. Storseth next and then you, André.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I guess I'll continue with the merry-go-round. Mr. Lemieux's military leanings are coming through here.

I could agree with moving COOL up and moving the cattle industry stuff up. I also like Alex's suggestion of interspersing some of the competitiveness with the program at the end—as per witness availability, when we get to that—and then I think we've got a winner here.

I would like to ask Monsieur Bellavance a question with regard to the potato cyst nematode. Are you planning on bringing CFIA in and asking them some very tough questions about how our producers were affected? We've had some effects in Alberta as well with some problems with sampling and everything else.

● (1150)

The Chair: Mr. Bellavance.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: That is a good question, Brian. I want the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to come at the same time as the potato producers who were affected.

To answer Pierre, I agree with him. However, we seem to be reaching a consensus. People seem to agree that we should deal with the livestock industry first. Still, I would like to clarify something, Mr. Chair. You seem to have already contacted people for them to testify as early as Thursday. If we do decide to discuss that first, I want to be sure that we will also have enough time to call our own witnesses. I would like to have certain people from Quebec here, and we will not have just one session on that question. These people must also be allowed to come. It is important to mention that.

If we begin with the livestock industry and, as far as possible, we reach a consensus then to initiate the program review and study competitiveness—that is what I am hearing around the table—we will have an interesting program for a good while. I think we can reach an agreement on that. If you followed my suggestion from a while back, the members could then add the study of certain files, and this would complete our schedule.

[English]

The Chair: I'd like to clear things up about being in contact with CCA. The clerk, in all good faith, went ahead and did that because there are very few witnesses that can come at short notice. It's not confirmed, by any means. If we decide that we want them to come, they can. But we thought it was fair to at least put them on notice, because if we did nothing on that and had today's meeting and then started phoning afterwards, then everybody would say that they'd only been given two days. That could happen with the Canadian Pork Council. We may be able to get the Canadian Pork Council here on Thursday or we may not be able to get them until next Tuesday.

We weren't trying to circumvent the process, or the clerk certainly wasn't.

Most of these witnesses who are in Alex's report—and he's got up to meeting number 13—all go together on a lot of the issues. There's that review of the Competition Act, and it's still part of the competitiveness in the thing, but it's a little more extended. There's more to competitiveness in the marketplace, and it has to do with the grocery stores, the petroleum industry, the fertilizer industry, and everything. There are a number of things in there.

Mr. Shipley, you're next on the list.

Mr. Bev Shipley: If you're looking for a motion, I will do that to make sure we confirm with the Canadian Cattlemen and the Canadian Pork Council for next Thursday. In terms of consideration of other regional organizations—you mentioned some from Quebec—I need a little direction. I certainly have some from Ontario that would love to be here—from the red meat industry, for example. In fact, when we get to the competitiveness, it would be the grains and oilseeds also.

I think, as a committee, whether that's a subcommittee or not, Mr. Chairman, we need to determine if we're going to start bringing in regional organizations, unless those organizations, such as potatoes, may not be grown in every region. Certainly we have them in Ontario also. So I respect that. I just need a little clarification in terms of the regional organizations coming in.

The Chair: Okay. My comment is that we decide the priorities today. Then when it comes time, Mr. Shipley, for you or anybody else on the committee to put in your list of witnesses, you include who you think should come forward. I think every member of the committee has that prerogative. We'll do our best to—

• (1155)

Mr. Bev Shipley: I do have a motion to make sure that the Canadian Cattlemen and the Canadian Pork Council are invited for Thursday. I don't know if that's what you need to move along.

The Chair: No, I don't we think we need any motion, just a general consensus.

Mr. Bev Shipley: A consensus? Okay.

The Chair: They've been put on notice that they could get called. If that's the will of the committee, the clerk will contact them, I presume later today, to give them as much time as possible.

Mr. Bev Shipley: I was just trying to move to the will of the committee.

The Chair: I'm getting the consensus around the table that this is what we'll probably do. Correct me if I'm wrong.

I have Mr. Easter next and then Mr. Atamanenko.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As far as the clerk goes, that was great preparation in terms of making the initial calls. It's easier to call back and say we can't do it Thursday; then we can do it another time. I compliment you on that.

They agreed on the Canadian Cattlemen's Association and Canada Pork Council. It's a good way to start. I think we need to know from them about the state of the industry and the impact of COOL.

At some point we do need somebody to talk about this trouble in the industry and the problems of regional slaughter capacity. We're losing an industry. The industry is big enough in western Canada that you still have slaughter capacity. We're losing an industry in Atlantic Canada; we really are. And it's very, very serious. It's going to impact on our barley markets and everything else internally. We're very seriously losing the mixed farms operations. We do need to have that looked at.

I would agree with Alex's point on the NFU at the next meeting. I do think they need time. I know people are saying it's a lot of time, but they're looking at the historical perspective and structure of the industry. I think we need to do that.

At the third meeting, Mr. Chair, I think we need somebody beyond the cattle industry itself to come. I don't think the Canadian embassy is doing enough on this issue. To make them understand that we're concerned, I would suggest we either bring somebody up from the Canadian embassy or—I don't even know if we can invite them—from the American embassy. But we need to bring in somebody who has worked on this issue. If they haven't worked on the issue, then we have a real problem. Whether it's from one of the embassies in Washington or one of the consul offices across the country, we need somebody to explain COOL—where it started, where it was, where it is now, and the impact on this industry.

From there, I think we need to start developing a report. At the end of the day, I really think this committee needs to make recommendations on what the Government of Canada can do for the industry. But we also need to send a message from this committee to the United States that we've had it with this protectionism they're going forward with. And certainly I think we'd be recommending that the government challenge them under the WTO.

The Chair: Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: I support the idea that we have the Canadian Cattlemen's Association and perhaps if we can get representatives from the pork industry in the first meeting.

I would like to modify my proposal slightly for the second meeting. I believe you tentatively have Darrin Qualman here. Rather than demanding this 45-minute presentation, what I would like to suggest—and I think it could work—is that we ask him to cut it down to 30 minutes and we bring in three cattle ranchers, three people who are on the ground who are not necessarily part of CCA, who can give us some on-the-ground stuff that's happening. We've all talked to these guys. I think between us we can try to get three people. Get them to criticize this report, get them to give us some ideas, and then spend the second hour going around and questioning Darrin and our cattle producers. I think that will be a very productive meeting and a logical follow-up to the actual association presentation.

If you are in agreement with that, I think this would really be good.

• (1200)

The Chair: Mr. Atamanenko, they're going to be getting us a hard copy of the report in advance, correct? Does everybody have a copy of that report now?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: They should have. I think we all should have it.

The Chair: Okay. I would urge everybody to do it.

I brought this up before. You're really tying my hands in the future, as chair, by moving from the traditional 10-minute presentation. It's nothing against the report. I'm sure it's good. But what do I say, or what does the clerk say, the next time somebody says, "Well, you gave them 45 minutes"—or half an hour or whatever it is—"Where's mine?" I'll tell you it's going to create problems. I just put that out there.

It doesn't mean that we don't want to listen to it. We have that report. Read through it. I'm only speaking for myself, but I don't need a 45-minute PowerPoint to tell me what's in that report if I've done my homework in advance. That's all I'm going to say on it.

Mr. Hoback.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have to agree with what you just said. I was going to bring that point up exactly. Historically 10 minutes is more than enough time. This is an organization that goes down in the States pledging allegiance to RCAP. Their historical perspective that Mr. Easter talks about is one person's opinion of an historical perspective. I think we need to include more people in that meeting.

I know Mr. Bellavance talked about some producers he'd like to bring in for witnesses. I would suggest that he bring them in that same day. We give them the 10 minutes to do their presentation. We can allow enough time to substantially do our rounds of questioning for the NFU. Then Mr. Bellavance would have the opportunity to bring in some of his witnesses, and maybe some other people have other witnesses they'd like to bring in. I think we want to get many

perspectives, not just one perspective on the cattle industry or the beef industry.

The Chair: Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Although I equally disdain what RCAP and the NFU are doing, I do have to respectfully disagree with Mr. Hoback. I'm not sure. I've read the report. It is a very extensive report.

I like a lot of what Alex is talking about when he talks about bringing in...and I think we ought to keep it to three. If we have to have more meetings where we bring in other people, then that's fine. But I hate these meetings where we have six and seven. I was in one just last night where we had six witnesses. You don't get anything out of any of them, you spend your entire meeting on the witnesses giving their presentations. If we on this side disagree ideologically with the report that the NFU brings forward, then we can have people here. If we have a couple of ranchers or somebody who will put the other side of the story, I have no problem with that. But having a good vigorous, wholesome debate on it and fleshing out the pluses and minuses, I don't have a problem with that.

As for how long you allow them, Mr. Chair, that to me is at your discretion. But I do think what Alex is suggesting with having three witnesses here and having a good intense conversation with the three witnesses...as long as it's balanced, that it's not just the NFU and then an NFU supporter. We've had that in the past too, and that doesn't create a balanced dialogue. I think it's important that we have a little bit of back and forth on it and have open discussion. I like a lot of what Alex is saying to that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Thank you.

I still am adamant that we give at least 30 minutes to the report, and if a motion is necessary, I'll make that motion. I would then leave it to my colleagues, if that passes and we allow 30 minutes, then to choose a rancher on the ground. I know people, but I would leave it to my colleagues to choose someone on the ground who's struggling, who's a cattle rancher, who can comment on the positive and negative aspects of what's going on in the industry.

Sometimes we don't hear that when we listen to the associations, and I think that's why it's important to zero in. You and I talked about it, Larry. There are some aspects in that report that maybe as a government we can advance. I believe that we need at least 30 minutes. If we need a motion to that effect, I'll make a motion.

The Chair: Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Chair, going back to the amount of time that witnesses have, when we discussed the routine motions, as a committee, we settled on 10 minutes. I think you're quite right that when we start to make exceptions, people who are outside those exceptions then start asking questions. What's wrong with them? They have important things to say. How come they don't have 30 minutes? Why don't they have 45 minutes? They have a PowerPoint deck or a thick briefing that they'd like to personally brief you on.

I'd bring up two points, Chair.

The first point is the one that you mentioned. As members of Parliament, we're expected to be prepared for committee, and that means reading briefing material. We have this report—thank you, Mr. Atamanenko, for distributing it to us earlier—and we have to read it and understand it. Ten minutes is ample time for a witness to highlight the key elements of a report or a presentation. I think it allows more time for dialogue, which is really what the committee is all about. It's us having a dialogue with the witnesses and having fruitful communication.

There is nothing to prevent a member such as Mr. Atamanenko saying to the chair that he has seven minutes and would like the witness to run through a section of the report. The committee would benefit from a better personal explanation from the witness, and the witness would have seven minutes of elaborating on a particular aspect of the report. Other members could follow suit, if that's what they want to do. But if another member would rather enter into a dialogue and have questions back and forth, the format is there.

I have a concern that some of the topics we want to discuss are difficult subject matters. Witnesses will have strong opinions and will want 45 minutes. It's not what we decided on as a committee. There is nothing to prevent members from asking for elaboration on any segment of any presentation, if that's how they want to use their time, but I am very much against making exceptions. Why are we giving a special nod to this witness and not to the 10 witnesses over here? I think it's a bad precedent. I understand there'll be a presentation.

Let's keep them to 10 minutes like everybody else. It's fair and it's equal. The important part is that it's equal. All witnesses should be treated in the same way when they arrive here in front of this committee.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1205)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lemieux.

Okay, we're back to the report. I think everybody wants everything that's in this report. It's only a matter of the meetings.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but it seems there's a move here to move up the cattle industry, which COOL is attached to, and in some ways, the competitive part of it is right on its tail. I think they're all potentially tied in. But we'll work on what we've talked about here. We'll get the cattlemen in, the NFU, the Canadian Pork Council, and some of the others. The lamb industry is another one that's affected by the COOL labelling just as much as the beef and pork industries. It's maybe not to the same dollar extent, but it certainly is in numbers.

Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Mr. Chair, we've all discussed that we want to see this. I think you have exactly nailed the order in which we want to do it.

The committee has also shown a consensus that we not tie into, for instance, two meetings for COOL. If it comes out that Monsieur Bellavance or Alex or Monsieur Lemieux decide they would like to have a few more witnesses to flesh it out a little more on COOL, we may end up having three or four meetings on that.

This is going to be a very important report. I didn't see Wayne hiding in the back. He might want to bring somebody else forward too. I think we should leave a little flexibility in your hands in terms of scheduling. Committees always work better when we give you a little flexibility, because we may want to have more witnesses on a couple of these issues.

The Chair: I appreciate that. I know the clerk needs that flexibility maybe more than I do.

Mr. Brian Storseth: This is a very important issue right now. As you said earlier, I don't want us having six or seven witnesses so that we can say we had all of these witnesses, but we then don't have enough time with each one of the witnesses.

The Chair: As long as we have that, as I said a few minutes ago, technically we're almost at a point in the discussion where we could entertain a motion to adopt the report.

Hon. Mark Eyking: Is there a motion on the floor?

The Chair: No, there isn't. But I think we're pretty near that point, Mark.

Hon. Mark Eyking: Yes, let's get it on there.

The Chair: Are you going to move a motion?

Hon. Mark Eyking: I think Alex plans to have a motion.

The Chair: Yes, I have Alex's next week here.

• (1210)

Hon. Mark Eyking: I think this—

The Chair: Alex, do you want to move that your report be adopted?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: I want to make sure, and I think we had better get a consensus around this table.

I understand what Pierre is saying. I understand the precedent setting. As a committee we sometimes make tough decisions, and I think the decision to have an extended period of time for Darrin Qualman is in all our best interests. I would like to ensure, whether it's a vote around this table or a motion, that we do it. I'm not going to leave it until we at least decide one way or another.

If you need a motion for that particular aspect, I'll make a motion.

The Chair: What's your motion?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: My motion is that we allow Darrin Qualman to be here for at least a 30-minute presentation, and that we round this off with at least two or three more producers on the ground, and then we have an hour of questions. That's my motion.

The Chair: Okay, we have a motion on the floor. Discussion?

Mr. Shipley.

Mr. Bev Shipley: I'm trying to understand, Mr. Chairman, why we would ever do that, what the benefit is when we have the written report, not only the summary but the extended report, and then have someone come in and give us a half-hour power point to tell us what's in the report, without his coming—or whoever's going to make that presentation—in the 10 minutes that are allotted to everyone. That's not to take away from this report or, quite honestly, other reports that those individuals will see are just as important as this.

You have to remember that this is one organization's report. If we wanted to have any of the other farm organizations—and I'm sure the cattlemen or the dairy producers or whoever we're studying at the time would say they have a half-hour presentation, because this has WTO implications; it has implications not only across Canada but across the United States and Europe. I guess that report then...maybe it should get three-quarters of an hour. Quite honestly, I think that any organization—and there may be some I would like to have come in and spend longer—but for the three years I've been on committees we've had some pretty significant reports done by professional people—and I'm not talking about lobbyists but professional people in their business. They can do it in 10 minutes, and then the best benefit comes in taking those reports and having the questions that come from all of us.

If we're going to take half an hour, by the time we've run through it, the only ones we're going to get, the ranchers or whoever's going to come, the one or two... And I agree with Mr. Storseth. I don't like having six or seven or eight, because you really don't get what this committee can benefit from if you have that many. I certainly couldn't support having an organization, regardless of who it is, come in and give us a 30-minute overview when we already have the executive summary in front of us now and the full report in our offices. It just doesn't make sense to me.

The Chair: One thing I should point out is that the chair does have discretion on allowing the witnesses to continue, if I could say. If you have this in a hard and fast motion, you've tied my hands in the future, big-time.

Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Chair, I disagree with you strenuously. I don't think we've tied your hands by this motion. I think we've given you a way out.

The rule is 10 minutes. It is what the committee has established. Alex's motion is allowing an exception to that rule. I agree with Alex's motion. Whether you like or don't like the NFU, if there ever was a professional researcher, Darrin Qualman is a very professional researcher.

The Chair: This has nothing to do with the—

Hon. Wayne Easter: No, no, I have the floor, Mr. Chair.

I think this is in-depth work that challenges the current theory in terms of the cattle industry. I've read the report. I haven't seen the presentation, but I think we would all benefit from the presentation in terms of a better understanding, and maybe we would leave with fewer questions as a result of that rather than more. Whether or not at the end of the day we agree with this, I don't think we can question the reality of the research, but whatever direction the industry wants to go, that's a different matter.

I would support this exception at this time.

•(1215)

The Chair: Mr. Hoback.

Hon. Wayne Easter: If there are others down the road, we'll have other motions.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Again, Mr. Chair, the issue I have with giving them longer time is that the committee members don't get the proper time to evaluate or ask questions. I cannot understand why they need 45 minutes to explain something that they've given to us in advance—or even 30 minutes. I can't understand why they need that, regardless. If we have the information in front of us, we should allow them to give their 10-minute presentation and then allow them to have the full benefit of the period to be asked questions and to explore the report.

What we're going to have is a presentation with no time to explore it. What kind of information are we going to garner from that? We read it, but can't explore it. That's what I'm concerned with, Alex. They'll come in and do their presentation, but then we'll have no ability to question them on it. Again, subject to peer review, I don't know if it's a qualified report or not. Mr. Easter has his interpretation, but that's his own interpretation. It's not the interpretation of the industry as a whole, for example.

That's what I'm concerned about. How do we make sure we have enough time to do proper questioning? In the seven minutes, then the five, five, and five, how do we get through so that all committee members can actually participate? By adding length onto their testimony, we take away everybody else's ability as committee members to ask questions.

I'm sorry, I can't support this.

The Chair: Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

There are two questions I'd ask Alex to consider.

One, in his motion would he consider moving the entire report and, in moving the report, include the motion that you've just moved, so we can move it as one and get this over with? I think we have consensus around the table on all of it.

Two, in your motion in regard to Mr. Qualman's presentation, would the committee be interested in perhaps putting their money where their mouth is in providing for that particular meeting to be extended by half an hour if we can get the room? If we want to have extra time to question the witnesses on the report, it would be available. It's not to say we'd have to use that time up, but if members so chose, we could do that.

If Alex could do those two things—move the entire thing, as Larry said, with your addition with the half hour—and then add on half an hour to the meeting, I could for vote that.

The Chair: Mr. Shipley.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Following through on the discussions we've had today, not just in terms of this report but in particular this report, we talked about the red meat industry, and I'm wondering why this is targeted only to the beef and not the pork. We've talked about our next meeting, and it's been recognized by everyone that we need to talk not just about beef and pork but maybe also the rest of the red meat industry.

Another report will come, maybe by this researcher, on the pork or sheep industry. Then an executive summary will come forward, and that will be, in my mind, incomplete because it will deal with only one issue, when our concern in this committee and in this country is broader than just the cattle industry. I think as a committee we've agreed that it is the livestock industry, the red meat industry, but we keep talking about the cattle industry. I've been listening to our comments. I still believe that this is being structured towards one sector of the red meat industry that is struggling. I don't think the intent of this committee is to deal with just one. I think we all recognize that we have a red meat industry that is struggling.

I will still go back to the point that we should have a 10-minute presentation, because we're coming in the day before with the cattlemen and the pork congress—hopefully—and that will be a part of it.

I think we're doing an injustice to the total industry that we're talking about.

The Chair: I think there was general consensus in regard to the report—which we're not really dealing with right now, we're dealing with the motion—to include the red meat sector in general.

Mr. Bev Shipley: With this report?

The Chair: No.

Mr. Bev Shipley: That's what we're talking about. It's about the time for them to come in and talk about this.

• (1220)

The Chair: If you want to change “cattle industry” to “livestock industry”, I think there was consensus around the table, so to speak.

I'm going to call the motion.

Go ahead, Mr. Bellavance.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Thank you. I am ready to vote, so I will not take too much time. I simply wanted to say that I do not see what the problem is for the committee. It is entirely free to decide whether

it wants to hear one witness a bit longer than another one. It is up to us to make that decision.

I agree with Brian. We always have to allow enough time for questions. I would also like all the members of the committee, including the Conservatives, to be of the same opinion when we have the minister appear for an hour. We always hope he will be with us for two hours, which would give us more time to ask him questions, but that never works.

Here we are asking to hear for 30 minutes someone who has prepared a report. This is not a whim on the part of someone who claims that 10 minutes is not enough for him. He has prepared a specific report on a file that we wish to discuss. Witnesses like that cannot be found on every street corner. Not all the witnesses who will appear will have done such an exhaustive job on the file we will be discussing. For some of them, 10 minutes will be plenty. Here we have an exception, no more nor less. Someone has prepared a report dealing specifically with a particular file. Obviously we want to talk about the pork sector and other red meat sectors. It is not because this report is about the beef sector in particular that these issues do not apply to the other sectors. We will talk about livestock in general.

I hope we will have the time to ask all our questions. This is half an hour out of a two-hour session. Do not tell me that it is impossible.

I will vote this way. Then, I would like us to settle the matter of the schedule, so that we can get down to work.

[English]

The Chair: Okay, Alex, you're second to last.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: I thank Brian for his comments.

I think we should just get this motion out of the way; otherwise we're going to be tied in with other things. I agree with what he's saying. We should just vote on this and get on with the rest of the stuff.

The Chair: Mr. Storseth, you're on the list. Is that to discuss the motion?

Mr. Brian Storseth: Yes.

I hate to be difficult about this, but in order for me to support it, I will actually move an amendment, Mr. Chair. Perhaps you could read the actual motion.

The Chair: I believe the motion would say—and correct me if I'm wrong, Alex—that the NFU presentation be allowed for 30 minutes, or something to that effect.

Mr. Brian Storseth: I would like to add an amendment that we also pass the first report, as you have already stated, as per Alex's suggestion. I would also add that we add half an hour of question and answer time to the end of the meeting, provided we have the availability of the room.

The Chair: That would be if time were available.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Then I'm done.

Mr. Randy Hoback: On a point of order, why are you going to... [Inaudible—Editor]?

The Chair: If it's all worded into the same thing; it's just one amendment. It's maybe two issues and one amendment.

Is there discussion on the amendment?

Can you read out the amendment?

Mr. Brian Storseth: Do you want me to read out the amendment again?

The Chair: I've been asked to have a vote again, but they want to hear the amendment.

Mr. Brian Storseth: The amendment is simply that I'm adding that we pass the first report, as suggested by you, Mr. Chair, which will be reflected in the blues. It was as per Mr. Atamanenko's suggestion. Also, I have added on....

You guys are going to have to word it as you want. We're going on the fly here the second time. Everybody has the gist of it, and six voted in favour of it. Then we add half an hour, provided that you can obtain the extra time for the room. If we can't, we can't.

• (1225)

The Chair: If the committee would allow, the clerk would take the time to decipher this with the intent that on top of Alex's motion, the report, as presented and discussed, be approved or something to that effect. Is that all right, everyone?

Mr. Brian Storseth: And that we add the half hour.

The Chair: Okay, first of all, I am going to call the vote on the amendment.

Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I understand the amendment asking for more time, but is the motion that we're voting on this first report as basically agreed to today, that the cattle industry would be first, the listeriosis meetings would be out because the other committee is dealing with it, and then we move to program review and some issues may come in between? Is that basically what we're voting on?

The Chair: Yes, that's my understanding.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I do feel strongly that we do have to deal with product of Canada issue sometime, and we don't want to lose that opportunity.

The Chair: When we get this report done, if you want to add that to it, it's just a matter of dealing with that.

Does everybody understand—

Mr. Brian Storseth: It seems to be the same things you said 10 minutes ago. We were about to pass it, and then Alex put this motion forward. So let's get this all done so we are done.

The Chair: I call the vote on the amendment.

Order, please. I call the vote on the motion of amendment.

(Amendment agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

(Motion as amended agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: I did not understand a thing.

[*English*]

The Chair: The motion carries.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Chair, can I be on the speakers list?

The Chair: Okay, we are finished with the report.

Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Chair, I'd like to put forward a motion that when the Canadian Cattlemen's Association comes they have 30 minutes for their presentation, and that when the pork association comes they have 30 minutes for their presentation.

The Chair: We have a motion moved by Mr. Lemieux. Is there discussion on the motion?

Mr. Bellavance.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: I have a question. Have these people prepared reports specific to this file that would require a PowerPoint presentation, meaning that they will not be able to present their point of view to us in 10 minutes? These people have testified regularly before us and I feel they are certainly capable of making a presentation in the 10 minutes usually allotted.

Otherwise, we are going to play this game, and I will also demand that 30 minutes be allotted to the witnesses I wish to present. And then the sessions may end up being extended unnecessarily.

[*English*]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Chair, I thank Mr. Bellavance for his comments. Those were my comments about five minutes ago, that we're creating exceptions, and I can assure Mr. Bellavance that if the Canadian Cattlemen's Association comes as a witness and if the pork association comes as a witness, you bet they will be prepared. They will have professional presentations.

My point was that if we're going to treat one witness differently, the committee will have to defend itself to the Cattlemen's Association and to the pork association to say they are not worth 30 minutes; we gave 30 minutes to somebody else, but not you, our friends.

To avoid that kind of complexity and to avoid being in such an embarrassing situation, we should adopt this motion that the Cattlemen's Association and the pork association have 30 minutes as well. As I said, I can assure my colleague that they will have professional presentations, and I'm sure they will use the time allotted to them to brief us thoroughly on their point of view, much as we have just allocated to the NFU.

The Chair: Is there further discussion on the motion?

Mr. Bellavance.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: I also wish to add something. At some point, this committee talked about the Canadian Wheat Board and a PowerPoint presentation was made. It lasted over 10 minutes. None of the other witnesses who followed or preceded the PowerPoint presentation necessarily had as much time at their disposal. That did not give rise to any complaints or problems. The exception must not become the rule either.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Easter.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Obviously I do not doubt the professionalism of the livestock producers. On the contrary, I want to hear them too. That is not the point I wish to make.

• (1230)

[English]

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Chair, while I speak against the motion, I really don't see this as being the Canadian Cattlemen's Association and Canadian Pork Council in conflict with the NFU thing in terms of time.

Mr. Randy Hoback: No. That's absolutely wrong.

Hon. Wayne Easter: No. Seriously, I think this is a complicated issue in which the NFU has basically challenged the system and how it's operated over the last 30 years.

An hon. member: [Inaudible—Editor]

The Chair: Order. Order.

Hon. Wayne Easter: It is something that is worthy of this committee's consideration. Because of the in-depth research on this subject, I think, whether we agree or disagree with it, it will require 30 minutes for them to explain it.

I don't see it as an organizational conflict. I don't think the Canadian Cattlemen's Association will care at all that the NFU has been given that time, because I think the kind of study it is, even with the summary we have, dictates that they should be given that exception in terms of time. I'm willing to give it and not get into this other craziness that every organization has the 30 minutes.

The Chair: Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thank you, Chair.

The opposition here are playing favourites. The very arguments they are putting forward now to not give 30-minute windows to witnesses on important subjects are the exact same arguments as I was raising 5 to 10 minutes ago.

I was saying that if the committee starts making exceptions, they're playing favourites, whether they like it or not, in that witnesses will not be impressed with the fact that they're being limited to 10 minutes when they know very well that, either the week before or the week after, the committee allowed another witness to have 30 minutes. These people are travelling great distances. They're putting a lot of time and effort into their presentations. They're tackling the same difficult and delicate issue as the NFU's going to be tackling. How can we pick? How can we possibly choose?

All I'm asking is that the witnesses be treated equally and treated fairly. The emphasis is on equal, because if we're going to give equal time slots, let's give equal time slots.

Quite frankly, I'm a little taken aback by the backpedalling of the opposition members. After having just voted on a motion to make an exception, they will not use the same reasoning they used to vote in favour of that motion to now vote in favour of my motion. I welcome them to explain that to the Cattlemen's Association and the pork association.

The Chair: Mr. Hoback.

Mr. Randy Hoback: To go on further, with Mr. Easter, it appears you're playing favourites with an organization that you used to belong to, and I'm sure—

Hon. Wayne Easter: I was president for 11 years; I didn't just belong to it.

An hon. member: And not playing favourites?

An hon. member: There we go.

Mr. Randy Hoback: You've made my argument for me—

An hon. member: It's favouritism, Wayne.

Hon. Wayne Easter: And I'm proud of it.

Mr. Randy Hoback: It's favouritism. That's the point I'm trying to make.

Hon. Wayne Easter: No, not at all.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: It's a good point, Mr. Hoback.

Mr. Randy Hoback: What we're trying to say is—

An hon. member: [Inaudible—Editor]

The Chair: Order. Mr. Hoback has the floor.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Thank you, Chair.

What I'm basically saying is there are political ties to these organizations. The NFU is widely known to be the agriculture branch of the NDP. So if you're going to play political favourites, then you have to—

An hon. member: It doesn't serve anyone.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Yes. What is it doing for this committee?

That's why Mr. Lemieux makes a good point. If we're going to give a half-hour to one, we have to give a half-hour to everyone, if we're going to thoroughly explore everybody's opinion on the topic. What we're doing now is getting a biased opinion from one organization that is tied to one member of the committee, and also tied to one political organization, and we're not giving a proper hearing to the rest of the witnesses.

I'm lost for words. Where's the motion?

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm going to call the vote. All in favour of the motion?

Mr. Brian Storseth: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

An hon. member: Mr. Chair—

The Chair: I have a point of order to deal with.

Mr. Brian Storseth: There is a factual inaccuracy in Mr. Hoback's statement. The NFU is not just the policy branch for the NDP, which it is definitely is, but also the policy branch for Mr. Easter. I think they should be more closely linked together. I just wanted to clarify that.

The Chair: I'm not sure that's a point of order, but anyway....

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I'd ask for a recorded vote.

The Chair: Okay. We've had a call for a recorded vote.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

• (1235)

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Chair, I have a notice of motion

The Chair: We can go to notices of motion in a second.

We have a letter, addressed to me, that I got as I was coming to our last meeting. It turned out to be a letter of invitation from the Canadian Grain Commission to visit their facility. That would mean travelling, of course. That's something the committee should be made aware of.

This is not to pre-empt the notice of motion Mr. Hoback has. Depending what happens, those two issues could be dealt with in the same breath, so to speak. As to what the committee wants to do with it, I'm at your direction, but we've had this invitation from them anyway.

There is a notice of motion.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Chair, my notice of motion has to do with the financial statements that have come out in the last two weeks from the Canadian Wheat Board and the substantial hit they've taken in speculative trading. I think it's very important, since the farmers in western Canada are on the hook for this and have no options, that the committee investigate and explore what happened here and make sure it doesn't happen again.

My motion is that the committee travel to western Canada to meet with representatives of the Canadian Wheat Board and other professionals to investigate the CWB's substantial losses in commodity trades over the last two years, despite the windfall in crop prices.

The Chair: Okay. Is there discussion on the motion?

We'll hear Mr. Storseth, then Mr. Easter.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Mr. Chair, I have another notice of motion. You could come back after we're done with the discussion here.

The Chair: I will do, then.

Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Chair, I don't know whether we need to travel to Winnipeg or not. It would certainly do the Conservative members good to see an efficient grain operation of the Canadian Wheat Board that maximizes returns to primary producers.

I have no problem at all in inviting the Canadian Wheat Board before the committee to explain last year's financial year as outlined in the annual report. Both the minister and the parliamentary secretary to the minister misrepresented the facts around that report, both in the House and in correspondence. I believe the Canadian Wheat Board has responded to both in writing and has outlined the real facts.

The fact of the matter is that the Canadian Wheat Board maximized returns to primary producers, much better than the open market did in those countries that are under the open market. I think what we have here is an absolute success story. Yes, money was lent from the contingency fund, but that will likely be paid back over the next year—which is doing good business on behalf of primary producers.

So I would certainly welcome their appearance before this committee, but I do not believe, unless the Canadian Grain Commission.... If we're going to Winnipeg as a committee, I have no problem with doing the Canadian Wheat Board, the Canadian International Grains Institute—all of them, and Cargill Grain, for that matter, as well—all in a couple of days. But I think that if we're—

The Chair: Are you suggesting adding that as an amendment?

Hon. Wayne Easter: If we're dealing with this specific issue, though, the Canadian Wheat Board could be invited before this committee to deal with the specific issue. It's immaterial to me which way it's done.

The Chair: We have Mr. Hoback, then Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Randy Hoback: I appreciate Mr. Easter's comments. I'm glad to see that he's open-minded to explore this. I would remind him that Larry Hill, who is the chair of the Canadian Wheat Board, is also willing to explore it.

The reason I would like to see this done in western Canada, though, is that it gives an opportunity to farmers in western Canada to see how the committee works, how the structure works. I would suggest that it be a public meeting that farmers could attend. They can observe how the committee operates and, in addition, they can listen to the Wheat Board and other professionals explore this topic.

• (1240)

The Chair: Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: It's their money.

That's a fair proposal, Randy. I think what Wayne said is that if we're going there, it would be a really good opportunity for us to visit the commission, the research institute, and have a tour of the Wheat Board offices and see how they operate. I haven't been there for a long time, since I was an interpreter years ago, and I'd like to see what's happening there and somehow maybe tie this in. I think it's a good opportunity. It would just be a matter, obviously, of setting time aside and trying to fit that into a schedule, but yes.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Randy Hoback: I'd be open to a friendly amendment, providing the focus does not get watered down, and the fact that we have to look at what happened here. It could be in excess of some \$200 million that's been lost, and nobody's asking questions, and I think it's our duty as a committee to start asking those questions and to make sure farmers don't lose that money.

Plus, there are major concerns out there about how this money's going to be recaptured and who's going to pay for this. So if we decide to go to Winnipeg, to look through CIGI and the Canadian Wheat Board, and tour their facilities, including the Canadian Grain Commission, I think that would be good for the committee to do. I've done all of that and it is worth our time, but I want to make sure that the focus when we talk about this topic does not get watered down by the other activities we're involved in.

The Chair: What's your friendly amendment?

Mr. Randy Hoback: I'd be willing to entertain a friendly amendment from Mr. Atamanenko or Mr. Easter.

The Chair: Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Chair, what I'd suggest is that to do this properly, and I think we're in agreement on this.... If this matter is urgent, then the Canadian Wheat Board needs to be brought in right away. I want to emphasize, though, regarding Mr. Hoback's comments, that he is talking about the cost side, but the fact of the matter is that the Canadian Wheat Board has returned to farmers about \$2 billion more than they otherwise would have got.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Hon. Wayne Easter: So he can talk about the cost side, but there is the income side as well for primary producers.

But what I would suggest, Mr. Chair, is that most of these organizations and agencies are centred in Winnipeg, and maybe the steering committee should meet and come back with a plan on how to do the five or six all at once over a two-day period.

I'm not talking against the motion, Randy. I think we're in favour of it. As I said, there are two ways of doing this: one, have the Wheat Board in here; two, go out there. But if we're going to go out there and want to make it part of our work, then let's do it in an all-encompassing way, and the steering committee should come back with a proposal that we tour the Wheat Board, Canadian Grain Commission, Cargill, CIGI, etc.

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Hoback, for the sake of getting business done, would you consider adding the Grain Commission and some of the other ones to your motion?

Mr. Randy Hoback: Yes, I'd be willing to entertain that. Again, this is a notice of motion, so—

Mr. Brian Storseth: We're not actually voting on this motion today, nor do we need to amend it. Mr. Hoback has given 48 hours' notice, so surely he and Mr. Easter can go for dinner tonight and talk about it and they can get a whole motion.

An hon. member: Are you buying?

The Chair: That's a good point. You can figure it out. We have the notice of motion, and I think there's been enough discussion around here on what we'd like to see added. We'll have that motion a little more complete, say, for Thursday's meeting and we'll go from there.

Mr. Storseth, your notice of motion.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I'd like to preface my comments by saying that Monsieur Bellavance and I both brought this up today. I'm glad that it was put into the report. I'm simply moving it forward. This is something I have committed to doing for my constituents.

I'm going to move a motion that the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food call before it the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to examine and answer questions regarding the potato cyst nematode and the effect their regulations have had on potato farmers, who have suffered severe losses, and to discuss specifically farms who have been quarantined and/or had their operations closed by an inadequate sampling.

I will provide a copy, and as I said, Mr. Chair, I do hope this will come forward through the report. That process will be much quicker than going through the motion process, but I do think it's important to have something like this on the record.

• (1245)

The Chair: Okay. So you have the notice of another motion, and they'll come forward.

Is there any other notice of motion?

Mr. Bellavance.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Can we talk about Brian's motion? Has it already been introduced?

[English]

The Chair: We're going to get a chance to debate the notice of motion at the—

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: We dropped the schedule, so let us go ahead with the motions. I am going to introduce one:

That the committee study the repercussions of the government's decision to set at 98% the standard making it possible to say "Product of Canada."

[English]

The Chair: We have a third notice of motion.

Mr. Atamanenko, do you have a notice of motion?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: No, Mr. Chair, I just have a comment.

I think what we have to be careful of is that when we start listening to people on Thursday, we don't let these motions take up the time such that we don't have time to listen to them. It's obviously at your discretion, but I think maybe they should come at the end of the meeting.

We've had that problem before, where we've talked about motions when witnesses were there. I just want to make sure that our priority when we invite people is for them to have a chance to speak and for us to have a chance to talk to them, and then maybe somehow move into the motions later. It's just a technical suggestion.

The Chair: I'll do my best to get through the motions as quickly as possible, but it's up to you people how long you want to hash them over. Your point is well taken, though.

Mr. Bellavance.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: As far as the schedule is concerned, Mr. Chair, are we agreed that the livestock industry will be the first topic of discussion? And then is there a consensus that we will go on to the program review and after that the study of competitiveness?

[English]

The Chair: To do what review? Oh, the program review.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: I would like us to do the program review second, then competitiveness. We wanted to add other files afterwards but, since we have to do so in the form of a motion, that is what I did.

I agree with Brian that we should add the nematode file. These are the two subjects I wanted to discuss.

Are we agreed on this as a starting point? Is that how we are going to settle this today?

[English]

The Chair: Yes—

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: There is nothing decided officially. I just want to make sure that this is how we will operate.

[English]

The Chair: I was just going to answer, yes, something has been decided. And in answer to your point, yes, those issues that you talked about have already been approved by motion. We will be dealing with them. The notice of motions and the content of them, if approved, will be added on to this. That would be my perception.

Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth: We've already voted on this as per the motion, the confusing motion that Mr. Atamanenko and I moved. You took care of it.

The Chair: Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Just to clarify in my own mind, then, the next meeting is with cattlemen and others.

The Chair: Well, we have to confirm that, but we suspect so.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Tentatively, the following Tuesday we would have Darrin Qualman and a couple of ranchers or something that we can work out.

Next is COOL. We have a couple of names on COOL.

Then we move into program review and—

The Chair: Again, that will all depend on witness availability, but yes, that's what we're hoping to do.

Mr. Bellavance.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Before we finish, Mr. Chair, I have noticed that the journalists still do not have their worktable. Some jokes were made about this, but it is not a joking matter. If Mr. Lemieux is a former engineer, I am a former journalist. I find that they cannot work properly that way. The committee already began looking into this some time ago, but I would like them to have a table to work on as of the Thursday session. This is a work took that would be very useful to them. I am not joking, I am serious. I am even thinking of introducing a motion to make sure they can work appropriately.

[English]

The Chair: I know you're not joking, Mr. Bellavance. I've asked for it twice. This is the third time. We'll see what we can do.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Be firm.

[English]

The Chair: Very good.

If there is no other business, the meeting is adjourned.

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